

HAMBURG



John Cummings' Mill sketched by Wanda Mary Dougherty.

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by Marjory G. Sipprell

The Town of Hamburg lies south of Buffalo, and has as its western boundary Lake Erie and its southern boundary Eighteen Mile Creek and the Town of Eden. To the east are Boston, Orchard Park, and West Seneca, and to the north Lackawanna. The town contains two villages: Blasdell and Hamburg, and several unincorporated communities: Armor, Athol Springs, Carnegie, Cloverbank, Lake View, Mt.

Vernon, Pinehurst, Scranton, Wana-kah, Water Valley, Windom, and Woodlawn.

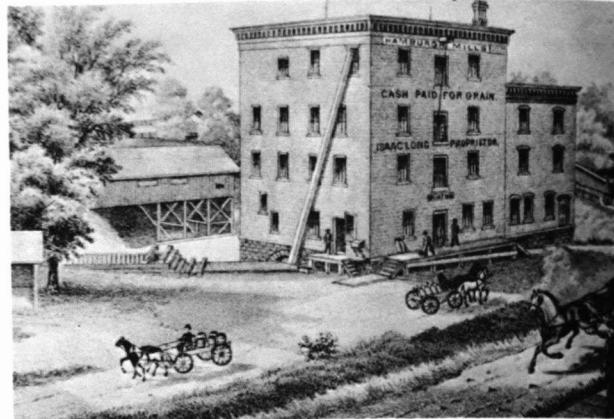
Searches on Hamburg property start with "Wilhelm Willink and others." In 1797, Theophilus Cazenove was appointed as general agent of the Holland Land Company. His name is left in western New York in the name of Cazenovia Creek. He appointed Joseph Ellicott to survey the lands and take charge of the western New York purchase.

Interesting letters dated in the early 1800's are preserved at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, written to Joseph Ellicott by his surveyors, who were working in the wilderness areas, as far away as Erie. Surveys made today attest to the amazing accuracy of these early surveyors, who worked under most rugged conditions. When the laying out of the Holland Purchase into townships and lots was completed, Hamburg was designated as Range 8, Township 9 and Range 7, Township 9.

One of the earliest roads was Big Tree, or Middle Road, from Buffalo Creek east to Avon, opened in 1798. Another was through Batavia along the north side of Tonawanda Creek to Tonawanda Indian Village to Clarence Hollow, what is now Main Street to Buffalo Creek. Erie Road was along the lake shore west from Buffalo, Cooper Ridge from lake shore along what is now Pleasant Avenue, White's Corners Plank Road, present South Park, and Abbott Road and Camp Roads, which still bear their original names.

Hamburg was first settled in the early 1800's by New Englanders. Its first land owner was John Cummings, who as early as 1803, bought land from the Holland Land Company. In 1806, he built a grist mill at the waterfalls of Eighteen Mile Creek, about two miles west of Water Valley. This was the first grist mill in Erie County south of Buffalo.

Among the earliest families to settle in the area around 1806 were those of Ezekiel Smith, with his seven sons and two daughters and their families, Obadiah Newton, Israel Taylor, Wray Littlefield, and a bachelor, Ezekiel Cook. These pioneers formed a nu-



Isaac Long's Flour Mill, 1879.

cleus known as the "Newton Neighborhood," now in the town of Orchard Park, on the Bunting Road. Ezekiel Cook did not remain a bachelor for long, as the first marriage was that of Amy Smith, daughter of Ezekiel Smith, to Ezekiel Cook. Their graves, and many of the pioneers are in the cemetery on Bunting Road.

The settlement soon became known as Smithville and later Smith's Mills, when two sons of Ezekiel Smith, Daniel and Richard, built a grist mill west of the present South Buffalo Street bridge on Eighteen Mile Creek, which continued as a mill for many years, being owned by Isaac Long, Reists, Bastians, and finally by John Schoepflin, until the 1920's.

Near the mill was a tannery in 1808, owned by James Husted. It was later bought by Thomas White, who also operated a store in the center of the village, and for whom White's Corners, the present village of Hamburg, was named. The tannery was bought by John Sigel and operated until 1896.

Among other early settlers were Abner Amsdell and Zenas Barker, both Revolutionary War veterans; Nathaniel Titus; Nathan, David, and Elisha Clark; Obadiah Baker; Seth Abbott; Amos Colvin; Nathan Bristol; Henry Arnold; Jotham Bemis; Bowman Salisbury; Moses Dart; Ebenezer Ingersoll; and many others.

In 1823, Scott Aldrich came from Rhode Island, and bought 375 acres of land in what is now the village of Hamburg, becoming the first real estate dealer in the area. Many title searches in and around the village contain the name of Scott Aldrich. He built a fine house which stood on the southwest corner of Buffalo and Union Streets, and he owned all the land west, on Union Street to the present Erie Tracks.

One of the first concerns of these Yankee pioneers was establishing a church. In 1810, a Baptist church was organized. (Records are at Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.) The organization meeting was held in Deacon Ezekiel Smith's barn. The first preacher was Rev. Clark Carr, and land for his house was given by Ezekiel Smith and Wray Littlefield. Methodist Circuit Riders came through the territory as early as 1813. The first Methodist church was built in Wright's Corners (Armor) about 1816, and the Second Methodist Church was organized in White's Corners on January 20, 1840. German settlers began arriving in the 1830's. Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church was organized in 1831, and St. Jacobus Evangelical, presently St. James United Church of Christ, was organized in 1853. In 1892, the cornerstone for Trinity Episcopal Church was laid. It was founded as a mission of St. Paul's in Buffalo. Today

Hamburg has many churches of almost all denominations. Several new places of worship have been built in the last few years — Grace Lutheran on McKinley and Newton Roads, All Saints Lutheran, and the Church of Christ, both on South Park Avenue.

Of equal concern with religion was education, and public schools. Although we have no record of the exact location of the first school, or the names of the teachers, we know that school was being taught in 1820 in the town. It was near the intersection of Newton Road and East Main Street in the present village of Hamburg. Family records tell of Mary Emeline Pratt (later Mrs. Joseph Taylor) teaching in a log school house that stood "on the site of William Bowden's Home." Research of village records and Bowden family data, place this school at 103 Main Street, opposite the present Village Hall.

The 1820 Census, which had Calvin Fillmore, uncle of Millard, as enumerator, lists Hamburg township with 2,034 "souls," 354 families, one in every family engaged in agriculture, 395 boys under ten, and 390 girls under ten. In 1825, a report gives us a statistical picture of Hamburg at that time: total population of the township was 2,661, 9,189 acres improved, 48,411 acres unimproved, 17 schools, 824 children, four grist mills, ten sawmills, four carding machines, two distilleries, and two asheries (for making soap).

In 1849, a brick two-story school house was built in White's Corners, and is still standing on Main Street almost opposite the Post Office. We have a list in the historical files of the entire enrollment at this school in 1854 —

123 pupils. The school was taught then by William W. Hammond and his sister Amy A. Hammond, and was the nucleus of Hamburg Central District No. 1. In 1868, the Hamburg Academy was opened and met the needs of higher education. This school stood on Union Street on the site of the Union Street Elementary School.

The Town of Hamburg now has two school districts: Central No. 1 and Frontier No. 4. Central District No. 1 has seven schools: Senior High, Junior High, Armor, Boston Valley, Charlotte Avenue, Union Street, and Pleasant Avenue. Total enrollment is around 6,000. Frontier District consists of Frontier High, Amsdell Heights Junior High, Athol Springs, Blasdell, Blasdell Arthur Avenue, Cloverbank, Wanakah, Pinehurst, Lakeview, Woodlawn Primary, and Woodlawn Intermediate, and has an enrollment of nearly 7,000. Hamburg may well be proud of its public school system.

There are now two parochial high schools in the township, Immaculata Academy for girls and St. Francis for boys, and seven elementary schools. In 1969, Hilbert College, a two year Junior College opened, making higher learning available within our township. Work is expected to start soon on the new South Towns campus of Erie Community College.

Through the years Hamburg has had nineteen Post Offices. The first within the present town limits was at Barker-ville, on the site of the Bay View Hotel at the lake shore, with Zenas Barker as Postmaster. At Campsburg, now Athol Springs, the Postmaster in 1823 was Daniel Camp. Later locations were Abbott's Corners, Water Valley, Hamburg-on-the-Lake, Getty (Windom), to



Hamburg Academy, built in 1868.

mention a few. Today within the town there are four post offices: Athol Springs, Lake View, Hamburg, and Blasdell, which is included in metropolitan Buffalo.

Hamburg proudly recalls that in 1891 the town was represented in Congress by Thomas L. Bunting. In 1953, John R. Pillion was elected as Congressman, and presently our 39th District is ably represented by Jack Kemp.

Small settlements grew within the township. In what is now Armor, in 1808, Jacob Wright opened a tavern and the area soon became known as Wright's Corners. On April 7, 1812, at Jacob Wright's tavern the first town meeting was held and officers were chosen. David Eddy was elected supervisor, Samuel Hawkins, Town Clerk. Later, this community was called Abbott's Corners, and in 1891, the name was changed to Armor. Another area, Water Valley, became a center of industry with a large flour mill, a woolen

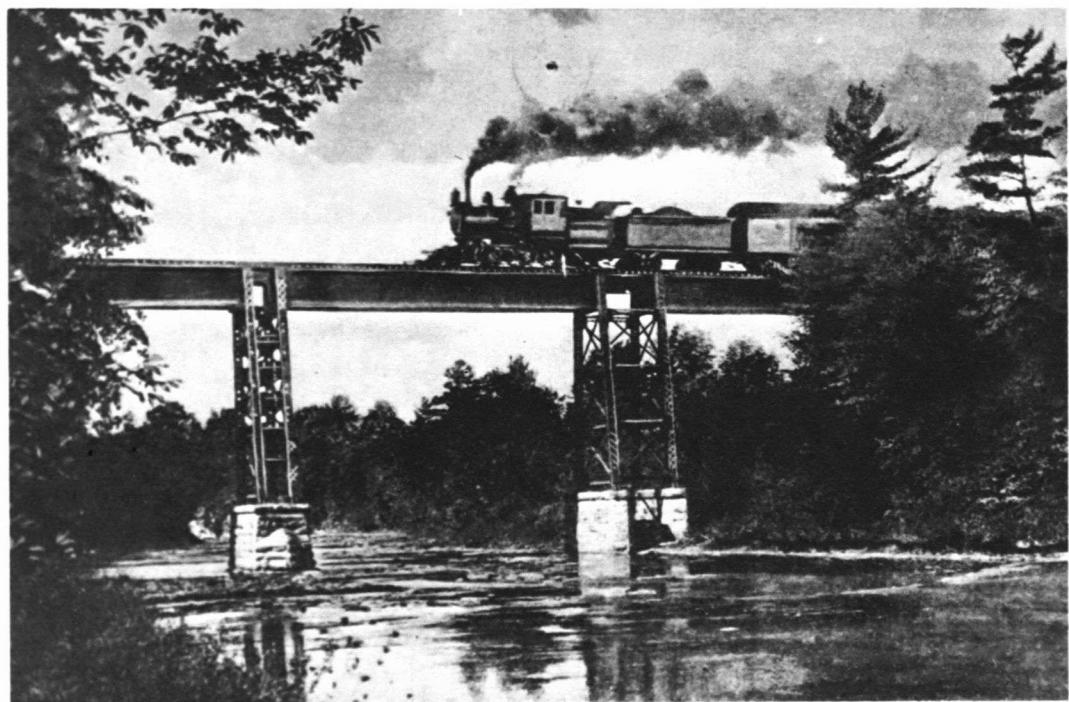
mill, an iron foundry, and a furniture factory. Water Valley had its own post office from 1837 to 1918.

Hamburg may well be proud of its volunteer firemen, and the excellent protection they provide. The founder of the fire department was Alexander Stolting in 1870, and the first chief when the department was organized was Daniel F. Prindle. In 1912, the Old Home Week Celebration, marking the centennial of the town, was combined with the South Western Firemens' Annual Convention. It was estimated that 25,000 viewed the parade on Firemens' Day.

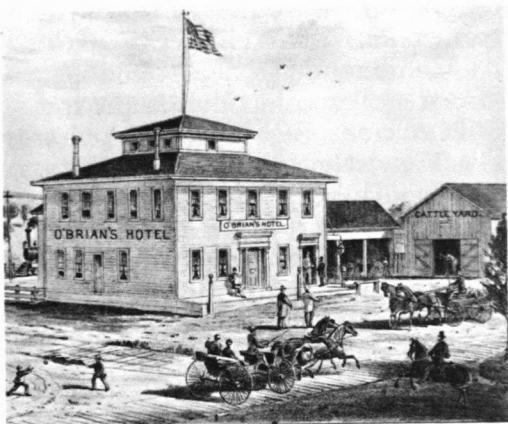
From original Company No. 1 whose old building stands on South Buffalo Street and has recently been replaced by an attractive new building on Long

Avenue, the township now has nine organizations. The villages of Blasdell and Hamburg have departments, and there are seven companies in the township: Armor, Big Tree, Lakeshore, Lake View, Newton-Abbott, Scranton, and Woodlawn. A mutual aid system, located in the Village of Hamburg Police Station, has contact with sixteen fire companies in the township, and surrounding towns, and can activate all sirens by radio. First aid and ambulance service is available in all districts. Each day when the sirens are tested, the sounds are reassuring to all, knowing fire protection or first aid can be readily provided by these dedicated men.

From crude mills in the early days of the town, when water furnished the only power, there has been steady



Erie Railroad Crossing at Water Valley.



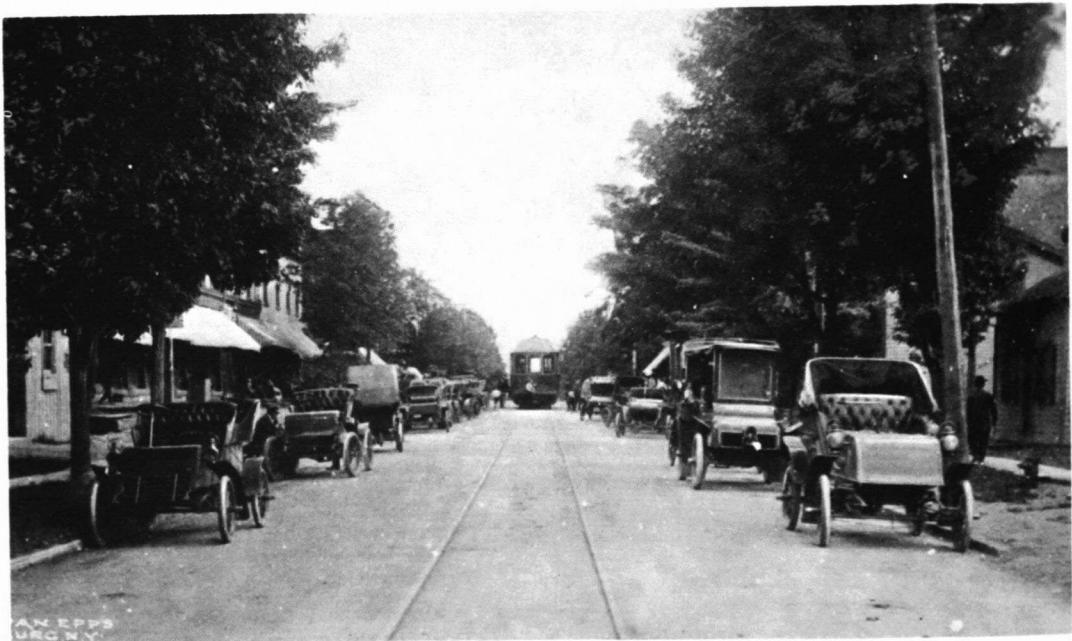
O'Brian's Hotel, Big Tree.

growth of industry. There were saw mills, tanneries, woolen mills, planing mills, a canning factory, brick yards, a glass company, to mention a few. In the early 1900's there were three trolley

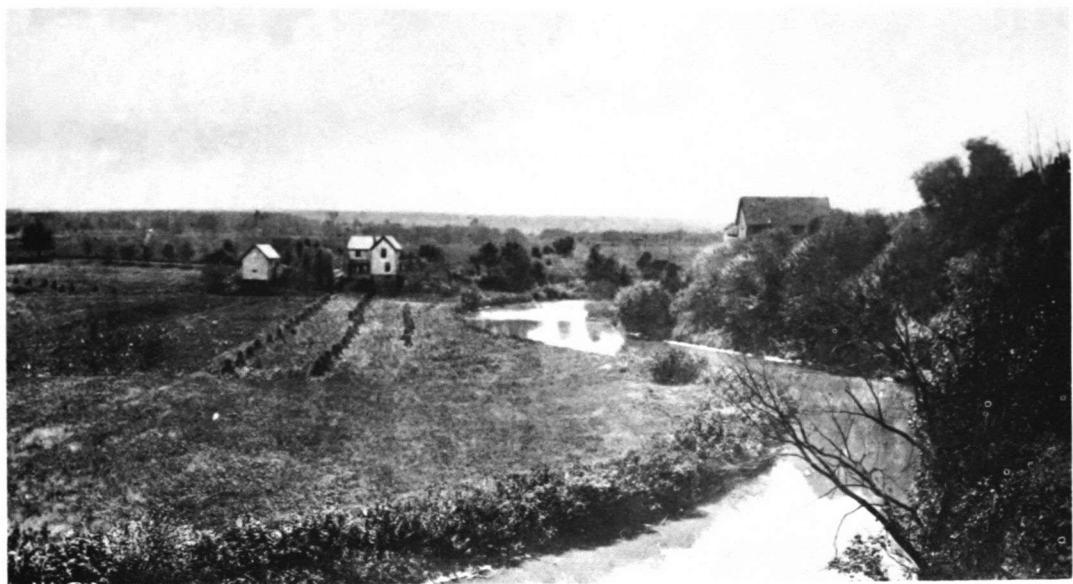
lines in the township, one a high-speed line to Erie, and two railroads, with stations in Blasdell and Hamburg. Present day industry includes units of the Bethlehem Steel Company, the Ford Stamping Plant, Eaton Brothers, Riefler Cement products, Electro-Refractories Corporation, and most recently, Chemtrol, an industrial waste treatment concern, a step in pollution control.

Hamburg has several shopping plazas with two more under construction, auto agencies for all domestic makes of cars, as well as foreign, all major food markets, so that most needs of residents may be met within the township.

Recreation for both youth and adults is provided within the town. At least fifty years ago the Town Park at the



Buffalo Street, Hamburg.



Eighteen Mile Creek, Hamburg.

lake was built, has been enjoyed through the years, and is now being rebuilt. There are organized activities for youth, three golf clubs, with a new course owned by the town, which will be ready for use next year. Far-sighted town officials have set aside playground and natural areas for the future. A community pool in the Village of Hamburg is enjoyed by members. The former Nike Base, now owned by the town, furnishes facilities for many local organizations.

Within the town there are three libraries, operated under the Buffalo and Erie County Library System. From a humble beginning in 1897, when the first library was housed in a store, Hamburg residents may now obtain any desired book. Probably Hamburg's most famous area is the fairgrounds, home of the Erie County Fair, now the largest county fair in the na-

tion. It grows more attractive each year. This year of 1971, Erie County's Sesquicentennial, we may all look with pride to the oldest continuing community enterprise in the county.



Erie County Fair at Hamburg, 1908.

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